

UNVEILING FEMININE MYTH: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF COSMETIC ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

It is believed that myths shape the society and influence the behavior of its people. Myths provide role models. As a folklore genre, they play very important role in the society. However, they are not the true accounts of reality but are cultural constructions. In advertisements the process of signification occurs at two levels namely linguistic level or denotative and myth level or connotative. The advertisers often use this mythic level to appeal to the emotions of the consumers and hook them towards their products. In this regard they feed on the man-made definition of "perfection" by creating names that carry stereotypes, myth and ideals. Keeping in view of the above deliberations, the present study aimed at unveiling feminine myth manifested in advertisements. The authors examine five different cosmetic advertisements taken from fashion magazines to unveil the feminine myth used in them. The Semiotic analysis technique has been employed to explore the possible meaning of sign, gestures, background colors, facial expression and tagline in the adverts. The paper also talks about the portrayal of female and how they are sexualized in advertisements.

KEYWORDS: Cosmetics, Feminine, Myth, Semiotics & Advertisements

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary society has been perfused with all pervasive advertisements. Advertisers often use iconic, indexical, symbolic modes of communication to promote their products. In doing so they propagate certain myths that are consonant with prevalent value and belief systems of the society. Advertisers feed on the man-made definition of 'perfection' by creating myths. In cosmetic advertisements, the advertisers often use and abuse female body to emotionally entangle the consumers towards their products. At the subliminal level, the advertisers transform the women into commodities to be marketed and their bodies turning into mere objects to be looked at and consumed.

In the world of advertising the women need to be a fair looking young girl and the shape of her body needs to be perfect, skin should be free from acne and wrinkle, body shape that fits the dress, no hint of cellulite and have full heads of silky, thick hair. In other words, advertising creates a mythical and fantasy world where no one is ever ugly, obese, poor, physically or mentally disabled. Such images are not reflective of social reality. The portrayal of women in advertisements creates and pushes myths of what is needed. Advertiser soften induce women to believe in those myths and they apply all the tricks to motivate them to achieve "right" and "perfect" appearance that seems unattainable. Through conditioning women generally think that by acquiring the type of beauty as depicted in the advertising images, they can attain happiness and bliss.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Myth is a value and a pure ideographic system and can be seen as a twist between reality and fiction. This means that the myth is neither a lie nor a confession and it will never guarantee the truth. Even though myths are not a reflection of the reality, since it is a man-made perspective, myths still become something natural in the society, an axiomatic image of the reality, which grows throughout history. In other words, the cultural myths found in the society shape the way we perceive the world. Barthes argue that myths are imbedded in all our ways of communicating and much of what we consider as culture, mass media, advertising and entertainments is built on myths. Further, the myth must be believed in by its audience to exist (Barthes, 1957).

Myth is commonly used to refer to beliefs which are demonstrably false, but according to semiotics, myths can be seen as extended metaphors. The power of such myths is that they 'go without saying' and so appear not to need to be deciphered, interpreted or demystified (Chandler, 2007). The media are constantly conveying numerous mythologies and ideologies which reflect the current era via powerful images, sounds and language (Chung, 2012) .

Gender roles and stereotypes are the mechanisms that advertisers use to propagate myths. More often advertisers depict women merely as an object. In order to promote a specific product or service they use the body of an attractive woman posing in seductive ways (Chowdhury, 2008). Another way of representing women in media is through closed eyes, having her gaze directed downwards and to the ground, or averted. This makes the female more easily accessible as an enjoyable object (Jansson et al., 2015). Men almost always appear fully clothed while more often women are depicted as scantily clothed, which comes back to the issue of women being portrayed more as sex objects than men (DiSalvatore, 2010). Similarly, women are more likely represented as sex objects and are submissive (Nagi, 2014 ;Tehseem & Kalsoom, 2015; Jansson et al., 2015; Radzi & Musa, 2017). Female body is used to take part in advertisements and reached different level with the opinion that sexuality is nothing to hide and open to public (Olarak, Kullanilmasi, & Derg, 2014)

Beauty seems to be the main focal point in most of the advertising business. Women in advertisements are usually portrayed as attractive having fair, soft, smooth, shining and flawless skin. Female beauty is expressed in media with youthful attributes, including wide eyes, full lips, high cheekbones, flawless skin, pleasant appearance and sexual allure (Cortese, 2008; Chung, 2012; Morris & Nichols, 2013; Tehseem & Kalsoom, 2015; Radzi & Musa, 2017). Black, old and fat women or any other women who cannot match the extremely narrow criteria of female beauty and sex appeal are excluded (Gill, 2008).

Myths are turning into fantastical image in ads, seducing public (Chung, 2012). Advertisers develop a myth of an ideal female beauty which is impossible to achieve because it is artificial (Chowdhury, 2008). Women are retouched into a perfection that can seem inhuman and forms a beauty myth that the only way to be happy with you is to obtain the beauty advertisements depicted (Cohan, 2001). Beauty products and cosmetics in general showed a tendency to mimic the perfection in a woman (Britton, 2012). This image of the perfect women portrayed in advertisements is not real, but a construction made by the help of cosmetics, photography and retouching (Jansson et al. 2015). Women resort to cosmetics to pursue men (Radzi & Musa, 2017) and to increase self-image and confidence (Britton, 2012).

However, these unrealistic ideal images of women lead to obsession with looking good, causing anxiety, depression, eating disorders and insecurity among women (Morris & Nichols, 2013). Despite this woman still trapped into the “beauty myth”. Further, many of them are simultaneously conscious of the fact that they are somehow being

“manipulated” (Moeran, 2010). Celebrity endorsement is also frequently used to manipulate the customer. By using celebrities as endorser, the company in question communicates the talent, beauty and perfection that are often associated with famous actresses/actors, artists, etc.(Löfgren & Li, 2010).

Color is a powerful tool used to manipulate customers purchases (Kumar, 2017). They are used in a special way in advertisements to attract customers. Further, colors convey both subtle and deeper meaning. For example, for most of us, red is an attractive color and therefore, sometimes advertisers depict the power of their products by using red color. Red color is used in advertisements to invoke targeted women as it is the only color that can really portray any vigorous reaction (Abdelaal & Sase, 2014). In visual communication parlance, red brings erotic feelings in the image of red lips, red nails, etc. White symbolizes light, goodness, innocence, purity, and virginity. Advertising often use White to bring the sense of coolness and cleanliness because it is the color of snow. Black is a mysterious color since it is connected with fear and the unknown. Paradoxically, the black color also denotes strength and authority; and at the same time it is considered to be a very formal, elegant, and prestigious color. People use black suit or dress to make him/ her looks thinner. Pink is associated with femininity (Kumar, 2017).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims at,

- Exploring the mythical stories about women with the aid of a semiotic analysis.
- Elaborating all possible meaning of sign & gestures, background colors, facial expression and brand name generated in the advertisements.
- Exploring how women are being portrayed in the advertisements.
- Finding the denotative and connotative meaning of the advertisements.
- Exploring the message of the advertisements.
- Finding out how women are sexualized in advertisements.

METHODOLOGY

Five different advertisements related to beauty products (see Appendix) from women’s magazines like Vogue and Femina of October 2018 issues have been examined. The pictures are analyzed by the aid of Barthes’ semiotic theory comprising denotation and connotation to detect the myth in advertisements. By using the semiotic approach, the study explored both the visual and textual components in the adverts. The visual aspects included are the color of the background, the facial expression, the posture, gestures and the dress code. The textual components included are the brand name, logo, slogan and tagline.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Celebrity Myth

Celebrities have tremendous influence on everyday life of the people in the contemporary world. They promote products of different companies, set trends and express their opinions on different issues. In modern societies people look up to these celebrities so much that they imitate them in their daily life. Further, the new generation youth develop a para-

social relationship with their favorite celebrity. In order to promote their products companies, engage these celebrities in their advertisements. People could able to recall certain ads with a celebrity that they recognize rather than being just a random model. Today's youngsters also think that if their favorite celebrity is wearing the latest and greatest item, then maybe that's what will contribute to them becoming famous or be perceived as a celebrity.

Table 1

Denotation	Connotation
A model in long shot with long brown hair dressed in a sari	The famous bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai. Saree is the Indian traditional outfit
Facial expression	Confidence, powerful, daring
Posture	Elegant and classy
The Eiffel tower in the background and the beige background	The origin of the product is from Paris. Beige signifies calm, relaxing and simplicity
Brand name is L'oreal Paris	L'oreal is an International cosmetics products having it's headquarter in Paris.
Tagline " A day in Paris. A celebration. Pure rouge #266 on my lips.	Pure rouge reflects the color of lipstick she is wearing
A red lipstick in golden and black casing	Red signifies strength & power. Gold signifies luxury, status, perfection Black signifies power, elegance& strength.

Denotation Level

A model in long shot appears on the left side of the picture. She has long brown hair, white skin, grey eyes and she is wearing red lipstick with winged eyeliner. She is dressed in a chic modern beige sari with golden necklaces. She is wearing a sleeveless blouse. Her left hand is touching the rail gently and her other hand is wrapped in the sari. The Eiffel tower is in the background. The Tagline is " A day in Paris. A celebration. Pure Rouge #266 on my lips." And below the tagline the model name is written Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. In the other picture the cosmetics are shown in black casing with golden character along with a red lipstick. The product name is L'oreal Paris and the background color is beige.

Connotation Level

Celebrity endorsement is highly used in cosmetics ads where the company intends to transfer to the customers the perfection, beauty and elegance the celebrity presents.(Audi, Masri, & Ghazzawi, 2015). The celebrity here is the famous Indian actress, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. Aishwarya signifies feminine beauty and a lady with class. Her brown hair, white skin denotes ideal beauty. Red lipstick is a symbol of prowess, passion and feminine power. Winged eyeliner suits those having almond eyes. The striking red lipstick with winged eyeliner makes her look powerful, daring and confident. Her beige sari represents glamour and simplicity. Sari is a symbol of national dress in India. She is elegantly portrayed as a modern Indian lady in the sari. Her golden necklaces signify luxury, status and wealth. The way she is holding her sari and the way she is getting down the stairs by the help of the rail connote the idea that she is from an aristocratic family and who is conscious of her status. Her gentle touch on the rail signifies that she is a fragile/sophisticated woman and should be taken with care by man. Her posture and her facial expression define her as a daring and confident person, someone having a firm determination and someone who is eager for passion. Her clothing, jewelry, facial expression, body language and the details around her connote a sophisticated, elegant and sensual woman with style and passion. The Eiffel tower in the background is linked to the brand name L'oreal Paris and with the name of the lipstick " pure Rouge". Rouge is a French word meaning red. The logo of the brand appears on the model belt. The cover of the lipstick is in black with golden character. Black signifies power, elegance and strength and gold signifies luxury, status and perfection. The beige

background signifies calm and simplicity. A well-known brand is always advertised by a famous celebrity is always portrayed as someone having an ideal beauty. Celebrities are beauty icons for Indian women. The advert denotes the idea that if one uses this lipstick; she will feel attractive like Aishwarya. This advert is also shaping an ideology that celebrities are ideal personalities and one must follow them if he or she wants to have personality like them. By using famous celebrity in adverts advertisers use the confidence building up techniques to persuade the customers.

Myth of Ideal Beauty

Table 2

Denotative	Connotative
A woman with half body and long hair staring at the camera.	She has a flawless, smooth and white skin. She has no blemishes or scars. She has an almond-eyes with dense lashes
Facial expression	Happy and smiling.
Gestures	Her index finger is placed on her pouting pink lipstick. A sexy appeal.
Pink Background	Positive and comforting feeling, feminine and Sweetness.
A whole range of "Lakme" cosmetics is shown in the picture.	Lakme is a successful cosmetic brand in India. Each part of the model's face like eyes, cheeks, lips have used all the cosmetics being advertised in the image.
The Tagline is "Ace that dewy makeup look"	By portraying a beautiful lady in an elegant manner, the advertiser is trying to convey the message that you can master your own dewy look just like the model by using the Lakme cosmetics.

Denotation Level

The model in the picture looks beautiful and young. She has a white and flawless skin with an almond- eyes and dense eye lashes. She is wearing a pink lipstick and pink blush. She has long silky hair. She is looking straight to the camera with her finger on her lips. She looks happy and smiling. The exposure of her skin is shown. The background is pink and in the right corner of the page a whole set of "Lakme" cosmetics is shown with the slogan "Ace that dewy makeup look"

Connotation Level

The model is wearing all the "lakme" products that have been introduced. The advert has left the impression that the model is looking beautiful and attractive because of "Lakme" cosmetics. Her white, flawless and smooth skin connotes the myth of perfection. Her long and silky hair is a sign of physical attractiveness. Her facial expression, her pouted shinning lips and gesture symbolize a seductive and alluring woman. Her smile looks mysterious which suggest that she can easily attract the opposite gender. Her body exposure is a sign of sexual appeal. The exposure of naked skin stimulates the sexual appetite and sexually appeals the opposite gender and their long hair flow is a sign of attractiveness and femininity (Cortese, 2008). The pink background and the pink cheeks and lipstick of the model convey sweetness and tenderness. Pink is a feminine color and it shows caring, affection and calm our emotional energies. She looks confident and satisfied with the product and her direct gaze tells the customers that they should go for the product. Her glowing face could be a solid appeal for women, to purchase and use this product in order to obtain glowing face like model girl of the advert (Tehseem & Kalsoom, 2015). "Ace that dewy makeup look" may convey the idea that you can master your own look just like the model who is looking attractive and pretty with the "Lakme" cosmetics.

Myth of Carnal Feminine

Table 3

Denotation	Connotation
A lady in a bathing suit showing her naked skin	Sexual appeal
Facial expression	Serious,
Body language	Sexy, confident
Blue background	Cleanliness, calm, tranquillity,
David off cool water	International branded perfume

Denotation Level

A lady in a black bathing suit with wet hair. She has a light skin with no makeup and blue eyes. Her mouth is slightly open. The zip of her bathing suit is a bit open showing her breast cleavage and her legs are visible. She is holding a surfing board. Droplets of water are on her bathing suit. The product name is David off cool water. It's a perfume in blue bottle. Blue is the dominant color in the background and the wave also can be seen in the background.

Connotation Level

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, carnal means 'of the body or flesh, worldly, etc., its secondary meaning is worldly, sensual, and sexual. Advertisements show women behaving in a sensual or sexual way, and that represent women as being controlled by their bodily desires. (Stevens & Maclaran, 2008)

The model is shown in a suit which portrays her as sexy woman. The droplets of water and her wet hair denote that she has just emerged from the sea alone. The zip of her suit is little bit open showing her breasts cleavage which connotes an erotic feeling. Her wet hair, her long naked legs and droplets of water create a sexual and seductive atmosphere. Her slightly opened mouth is a sign of sexuality. Her serious facial expression and her pose define her as confident. By holding a surfing board, we get to know that she can surf which feature her as a bold, wild and daring lady and that she is not under any male dominance. At the same time this leaves a message to women that they should be daring and adventurous. The name of the perfume which is "cool water wave" explains the sea, wave and the theme of water and the color blue. The predominant color in this advert is blue. Blue symbolizes confidence, calmness, tranquility, cleanliness, freshness and aqua. The background is reflecting the "cool" theme. Wave in the background is used to reflect the name "wave" in the bottle. The perfume reflects femininity and a free spirit. Perfect for outgoing women who enjoy being carefree. The wet exotic, flawless and sexy lady evokes sexuality and this means she is only portrayed as an object, something for the opposite gender to look at. It is more common to portray females as sexual objects when advertising perfume than any other type of product (Jansson, Svensson, & Jansson, 2015).

Myth of Purity

Table 4

Denotation	Connotation
A lady dress in white	Purity, cleanliness, simplicity
Facial expression	Smiling, happy, jovial
Posture	Angelic
Colorless background	Simplicity
Product name "Dermafique"	Free facial cleanser
Slogan "cell by cell"	The product helps in building cell by cell.

Denotation Level

A lady in the middle of the image is dressed in white. Her eyes are close and she is smiling. Her hair is open and her hand is placed on her head where her fingers are touching her hair softly. She is wearing a simple bracelet. The background is colorless. At the bottom of the advert, there is a blue bottle where the product name "Dermafique" is written in white. The logo of the product is placed in big size in the middle of the advert. Below the logo five lines are written in black where "cell by cell", "step by step", "more with less" are written in bold. The brand name "Dermafique" is written in big characteristics followed by the slogan "cell by cell".

Connotation Level

The model looks happy and she is smiling showing her teeth and her eyes are close. The happiness and smile on the model face denote a sense of satisfaction about the product. She feels fresh, lively, active, youthful, pure and clean. Her smile symbolizes a kind of acceptance towards the product. Schroedar (1998) conjectured that an open-mouth smile for a female is identified with a 'New women who is more liberated, adventurous and independent, which are characteristics of an empowered woman'. Her hand placed on her head may connote the idea that she feels blessed like an angel and her closed eyes show that she is enjoying the moment. She is completely dressed in white, a color often associated with purity, innocence, and cleanliness. Her bracelet signifies simplicity. Showing all teeth may signify confidence. The bottle is blue, a color associated with water, calmness, freshness and purity. The sentence "we believe that the essence of beautiful skin is built cell by cell and step by step" reinforces the idea that it is important for women to be beautiful and taking care of their skin by getting rid of blemishes and achieving the ideal beauty." we believe in skincare routine that delivers more with less". To attain that perfection, women must devote their time every day in taking care of their skin.

Myth of Femme Fatale

Table 5

Denotative	Connotative
A model with smoky eyes and red lipstick	Daring, femme fatale
Facial expression	Mysterious, powerful, seductive
Gesture	Delicateness
Black Background	Powerful, mysterious, elegance
Brand name "Dazler Eterna"	Leading makeup cosmetics
Slogan "To unveil your real shine"	To give a glow to your face.

Denotation Level

A model is featured with an intense look and wearing a red lipstick and red nail polish. She has a white skin, blonde hair and grey eyes. Her mouth is slightly open she is looking to the other side of the camera. She is softly grasping a makeup stick where the brand name "Dazler Eterna" is written on it. The palm of her hand looks soft. Nine different skin tone of the makeup stick are shown in the advert. Down at the page corner the makeup stick is shown in the purple shining cover. Above the makeup stick the slogans "to unveil your real shine" is written and above the slogan Miss Diva and Miss Universe are mentioned. The dominant color in the advert is black. The casing of the makeup stick is purple.

Connotation Level

The so-called "fatal woman" is a kind of "devourer of men". She is both fascinating and terrible all at once. Her figure is a kind of beauty that is both enigmatic and threatening, but most definitely attractive. She not only seduces but

hypnotizes. She makes men fall to their knees at her feet. However, her only purpose is to destroy them.

In this advert of Dazler Eterna, the Miss universe India 2018 is chosen to advertise the Majestique makeup stick. Her facial expression and makeup denote a sophisticated and sensual woman with style and passion. Her slightly squinted eyes, her "serious" facial expression and her posing can define her as a confident, powerful femme fatale and a modern lady. Her red lipstick and her slightly open mouth are all signs of a sexy and attractive lady. Red nail polish and lipstick connote energy, highly confident and powerful. She is softly grasping the makeup stick. According to Goffman far more often women are depicted in situations where they softly touch themselves or they gently and protectively grasp or gestures towards the product. The softness of her palm fortifies the myth that a woman is fragile and she is not meant for manly task. The dominant color here is black. Black denotes mystery, sophistication, power, coldness and elegance. A femme fatale is free-minded person who challenge the rule, choose her own path and act daring. These qualities can be seen on the face of the model. The casing of the makeup stick is purple and purple symbolizes ambition, royalty and wealth. Purple also evokes a sense of success and wisdom. The slogan "to unveil your real shine" may suggest that you will shine bright and the makeup stick will give you a flawless and smooth skin just like the model.

CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that advertisements are myth carriers, they carry dreams and fantasy. They encourage women to look attractive, sexy, and slim with a wonderful shape. However, such unrealistic portrayal forces women to struggle for an ideal beauty which therefore lead to constant low self-esteem and eating disorders. Women resort to cosmetics to look attractive and to woo men with their charm. The study also showed that women are career focused, independent and daring; however, they are still portrayed in a seductive way. Their squinted, averted eyes and slightly opened mouth are signs of sexuality. Their feminine touch and their gentle grasp towards a product show them as being fragile and delicate and they should be taken with care.

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APPENDIX: COSMETIC ADVERTISEMENTS CHOSEN FOR ANALYSIS



Myth of Celebrity Myth of Ideal Beauty



Myth of Carnal Feminine Myth of Purity Myth of Femme Fatale